

# Ba Gua: Hidden Knowledge in the Taoist Internal Martial Art

The internal styles of traditional Chinese kung fu, the *nei chia ch'uan*, are the more rare and mysterious of the martial arts and, when fully developed, extremely powerful and effective.<sup>2</sup> These are the styles of Ba Gua (Pa Kua) Zhang, Xing Yi (hsing I) Quan, and t'ai chi ch'uan.

In my youth, when I first began to study martial arts, I thought their purpose was only physical exercise and self-defense. My Ba Gua companions and I often played games to see who could remember more and we continuously tried to outperform each other. It was exciting to dodge, twist, and turn to counter each other's attacks. Years later I would begin to realize the great depth of the art. I discovered that Ba Gua is a far deeper subject than I thought was possible when I studied it as a child.

内家拳  
*nei chia ch'uan*

八卦掌  
*Ba gua (Pa Kua) Zhang*

I learned that at the heart of Ba Gua was the *I Ching*; the great and ancient oracle, book of wisdom, and most important philosophical work. The *I Ching* is the study of change. It codifies the principle of change through analysis of the lifeblood of the universe: the primal opposing forces of creation and bipolar opposites of yin and yang. According to ancient sages, life, which is change, results from union of the tiger of *yin*, the feminine and receptive force which rises to meet the descending dragon of yang, the male and creative force. The interplay of the tiger Yin and the dragon Yang brings about life, change and birth. This is the essence of the philosophy of Ba Gua. After many years I understood that the martial art of the Ba Gua palm, like the philosophy it is derived from, is adaptation, extension of power, and constant change; because of these it is able to continually meet and adapt to any circumstance. According to the ancient Chinese Taoists, "reality" or "truth" is never frozen or crystallized, but fluid. In the same way that the trigrams of the *I Ching* do not represent truth as a fixed point but as the observation of harmony with change, the Ba Gua martial art reflects its philosophical roots via its constant flow of movements.

太極拳  
*t'ai chi ch'uan*

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